

# CRITICAL CURRICULUM DESIGN FOR BLENDED LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE STRATEGIES, PRINCIPLES AND CHALLENGES OF INTERACTIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

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## ABSTRACT

*The main purpose of this article is to introduce a critical curriculum design approach for bringing curriculum change for Blended Learning in higher education. Furthermore, the strategies, principles and challenges of this approach are also presented. This paper provides a perspective on such serious concerns as whether curriculum change should start with professors, administrators, learners, education communities and/or professional reformers at local, state and national levels. Also, this paper includes treatment of the Radical Constructivists' view of blended learning with merging Media Richness Theory. The author hopes that it emphasizes the importance of considering a wide range of situations in implementing curriculum change, of matching innovation with the realities of the interactive classroom management in higher education. Besides, the author's intention in this paper is to discuss the rights of learners and professors by fostering courtesy, confidentiality and human dignity of critical curriculum design for blended learning.*

## INTRODUCTION

*Blended Learning (BL)* is the integration of several approaches to educational processes which involves the deployment of diverse methods and resources, and learning experiences which are obtained from more than one kind of information source. As pointed out by Rossett, Douglass, and Frazee (2003), choices for blended learning go beyond the traditional classroom. These options develop knowledge societies, which are based on authentic and democratic foundations. A blended learning approach strongly requires a critical curriculum design and a change process in higher education, a wider multi cultural diversity, a shared power and more freedom in colleges, as it involves professors and learners in building interactive class management in higher education.

An awareness and understanding of today's major social, political, economical and cultural changes requires adoption on the part of the curriculum. A critical

curriculum design is relevant to the management change. In this reality, College professors would have the opportunities to reformulate a curriculum for their classrooms. However, they are often unwilling to develop a new curriculum and put it into practice for various reasons: These professors are constrained by lack of time due to their massive teaching, research and advisor duties as well as community partnership schedules, and they perceive resistances to change from colleagues and/or learners. As noted by McNeil (1996), even if others are not actually opposed to professors implementing a new curriculum, the anticipation of resistance can be enough to exclude critical innovations. Most critical curriculum innovations might not affect a particular classroom, but an entire College and/or campus. Without the novel approaches for developing shared norms, values, ethics and goals, and being aware of biases and stereotypes, professors are more interested in planning for their own classroom rather than for entire College and/or campus. Although it is very

complicated to achieve a College's curriculum modifications through professor initiation, this change process has an increasingly profound impact upon power and authority in the College.

### Purposes

In such traditional and rigid curriculums shaped by capitalist hegemony and their political and cultural aegis, few professor-learners experience the reality of democratic participations in their every day lives. Learning, therefore, must be a boarder concept than formal conventional education. Democratic-egalitarian essentials for democratic classrooms in higher education can be able to build formal and informal progressive knowledge networks via new communication technologies. *Blended Learning (BL)*, therefore, is a dynamic learning method to merge the gap between egalitarian values and classroom practices. BL provides professor and learners with extensive learning and communication experiences that promote the democratic way of life. This is the strong foundation of a democratic society. Dewey (1916) says that an egalitarian society "must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control the habits of mind which secure social change without introducing disorder" (p.115).

With today's prevalence of cutting-edge technologies in higher education, BL merges diverse traditional resources and e-learning with other educational resources. Furthermore, this arrangement refers especially to combine e-learning human resources with conventional ones. These technology-based collaborations help professors and learners to make democratic decisions for dialogic leadership. These engagements increase awareness of their own identities and differences, and help to define the democratic values associated with equalized of access to human rights. These partnerships

require interactive classroom managements and dialogic leaderships for democratic decisions. On the other hand, as noted by Bonk and Graham (2006), Campbell and Hanlis (2002), Grund, Grote and Gerber (2004), Oliver and Trigwell (2005), Sharma (2003), and Whitelock and Jelfs (2003), there is a need for a critical curriculum design for effective BL in higher education. To develop a common vision of social justice, this new curriculum must involve professors and learners in an egalitarian decision-making process. Within the context of these concerns, this paper focuses on the following four main issues:

1. How do professors and learners deeply engage in developing a critical curriculum design for BL in higher education? How does this new approach provide them with alternative holistic forms and scaffolding strategies of social justice? What are the philosophical foundations and backgrounds of interactive classroom management needed to accelerate democratic transformations?
2. What are the possibilities and potentials of a critical curriculum design for BL in higher education? How can these opportunities engage them in critical civic responsibilities and powerful social actions? What are the strategies, principles and challenges of interactive classroom management?
3. What are the unique and diverse perspectives, and also methodological strengths and weaknesses of BL in higher education? How does BL obtain genuine equal opportunities and democratic participations in interactive classroom management to build knowledge networks which are not characterized by power, dominance, hierarchy and competition?
4. How does BL promote critical communication activities for interactive classroom management to empower authentic and high quality lifelong

learning experiences? How do they fight against the hegemonic power of capitalism and its unfair structure in BL milieus?

### Theoretical Background of the Study

BL is an active process to obtain, evaluate and produce knowledge. Professors should help their learners to become active participants in higher education. Therefore, entire classroom management must be interactive so that learners can be able to work on complex projects, synthesize knowledge to build their own understandings, learn skills and concepts, and use them to solve real world problems. In this constructivist milieu, professors and learners can adopt innovative classroom management strategies for a critical curriculum design as higher education is going through a critical planning and management revolution process. In this case, it is very important to combine learning and communication theories together. The *Radical Constructivist Theory (RCT)* and *Media Richness Theory (MRT)* can support egalitarian and liberating curriculum activities, and also prepare professors and learners for fully democratic participation in interactive classroom management.

### The Radical Constructivist Theory and Media Richness Theory

RCT is an unconventional approach to the problem of knowledge and knowing as a *theory of knowing* rather than a *theory of knowledge*. It starts from the assumption that knowledge, no matter how it is defined, is in the heads of persons, and that the thinking subject has no alternative but to construct what he or she knows on the basis of his or her own experience. The philosophical-epistemological background of RCT is mainly represented by Ernst von Glasersfeld. As highlighted by Riegler (2003), von Glasersfeld points out that knowledge is not passively received, but actively built up by the cognizing subject. The function of cognition is adaptive, and serves the

organization of the experiential world. RCT particularly focused on individual self-regulation and the building of conceptual structures through reflection and abstraction (Glasersfeld, 1995). Furthermore, authentic learning depends on seeing a problem as one's own problem, as an obstacle that obstruct one's progress toward a goal. From the RCT perspective, the cognizing subject cannot empower her/his experiences that all knowledge is constructed out of those experiences. RCT does not suggest that there is no external reality, but strongly mentioned that learners can generate her/his reality with the limits of their experiences. Professors and learners can operate it in their own private and self-constructed worlds. According to von Glasersfeld (1995), professors give to learners "*necessarily remains tentative and cannot ever approach absolute determination*" (p. 37).

MRT is based on contingency theory and information processing theory. First proponents of the theory were made by Daft and Lengel (1984). The theory of *Media Richness* is one of the most widely used media theories. It argues that task performance is improved when the needs of task information are matched to a medium's richness or its capacity to facilitate shared meaning (Daft and Lengel Trevino, 1986). MRT points out that media vary in certain uniqueness that affects personal ability to communicate rich information. Daft and Lengel (1986) mentioned that this theory theorizes which media should prove most effective in what situations. Based on this concern, theory does not focus on conjecturing how managers choose media. According to Daft and Lengel (1986), MRT explains the impact of various types of media those were the basic foundations of interactive online communications. According to this theory, the various communications media differ in richness. Rich communication media allows the transmission of a multiplicity of cues, provides immediate feedback, allows communication with both

natural language and numbers, and facilitates the personal focus of messages.

As discussed by Vander Westhuizen and Krige (2003), BL environments are the places, which represents the real world. To generate interactive classroom management atmosphere, a critical curriculum design must make a radical break from the generally accepted views, as our knowledge of the world must lie somewhere between materialism and idealism. This design approach must take advantage of the Internet-based new technologies to generate radical revolutions in BL environments. Therefore, RCT and MRT can support for dynamic non-traditional approaches in a critical curriculum design. This allows professors and learners to be free from an ancient philosophical debate, and also to develop new models of understanding of how they integrate the strategies and principles of BL to build interactive classroom managements. In this case, as mentioned by Spring (1999), language and social interactions allow for interpersonal communication activities, but never allow an individual to escape from isolation as a known being. RCT and MRT provide professors and learners within a framework of social interactions whereas they can be able to remain cognitively isolated. Besides, this approach can reduce ambiguity through MRT for empowering interactive classroom management in a BL setting.

#### **The Framework for Interactive Classroom Management**

Interactive classroom management should combine the learning and communication theories. The *Radical Constructivist Theory (RCT)* and *Media Richness Theory (MRT)* can deal with these educational environments. As noted by Jones (1987), the result is a systematic approach towards interactive classroom management in which essential skills and procedures are merged with a coherent framework that can be served as a guide to practice. Table 1 shows a framework that focuses on a critical

curriculum design for BL in higher education. This framework generates an open and flexible model of theory and practice for interactive classroom management. Furthermore, this framework provides guidelines to useful practices which permit the professors and learners to see how the entire classroom functions as a social system. Strategies, principles and challenges of interactive classroom management need to be developed within this framework that includes an awareness of the major forces of social and political change facing with the curriculum. This framework provides a critical understanding of political and social forces shaping educational policy in BL. As mentioned by Spring (2002), professors and learners can critically explain and explore how this policy has been made for their classrooms.

This framework provides professors and learners with insightful, authentic and comprehensive foundations that discuss the flexible relationships among culture, cognition and learning. Within these relationships complex classroom diversity can be organized. As discussed by Charles (1996), professors and learners are enthusiastically concerned with a well-structured learning atmosphere in their classrooms, and there are times when they must use a critical curriculum design in order to spend class time interesting and productive. Furthermore, this framework that encourages democratic dialogues provides them with opportunities to share learning, performance and practices. These changes should lead to modification of the curriculum and to innovations of curriculum change. BL is aimed at helping professors and learners to obtain critical knowledge and skills to implement the proposed change beyond the control of elite power.

#### **The Strategies and Principles of Blended Learning (BL) for building an Interactive Classroom Management**

The major focus of a critical curriculum design is on the

| Critical Curriculum Design for Blended Learning in Higher Education |               |  |  |   |   |  |   |   |
|---|---------------|--|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| Learning  | Communication |  | Media Richness Theory  |   |   |  |   |   |
|   | Foundations   | Clarity  | Completeness   | Contextually  | Truthfulness  | Diversity  | Flexibility   | Accountability  |
| Radical Constructivist Learning Theory                              | Social        | Understanding different cultural knowledge transforming diverse social groups                        | Establish powerful motivations to empower self-esteems and self-perceptions                  | Connecting the prior knowledge to new acquisitions by emphasizing culturally diverse contents | Be aware of the relationships among power, culture and society          | Consider the social and cultural backgrounds, knowledge and skills of learners by altering variables, such as disabilities, learners at risk, etc. | Respect and acceptance of diverse cultural traditions by the dominant power structure | Be carefully controlled in order to gain useful information in democratic manners                   |
|   | Management    | Use clear language that affect attitudes and regulate online activities                              | Make powerful decision makings to transfer diverse real-life experiences to the curriculum   | Cope with the credibility issues in interactive classroom management                          | Provide timely and relevant information about Blended Learning          | End arbitrary and discriminatory practices through collective actions  | Discuss potentially positive features of their own change model                       | Define the implementation obstacles and stages for Blended Learning                                 |
|   | Technological | Build multiple opportunities for professors and learners to have different technological experiences | Focus on their technology skills at communications to indicate their interaction progressing | Provide a guideline for coping with technology-based problems and barriers                    | Define professors and learners' technology-based needs and expectations | Establish new approaches to use traditional technologies and emerging ones together  | Adopt asynchronous, synchronous and/or models for interactive communications          | Develop an action plan to gain knowledge how to communicate professors and learners with each other |

Table 1. The Strategies, Principles and Challenges of Interactive Classroom Management

professors and learners partnerships, to notice their responsibilities to generate social, emotional and cognitive circumstances in classrooms. As mentioned by Hernández Sheets (2005), this kind of curriculum activity improves their understanding of the role of culture and also language in higher education. These concerns encourage interactive classroom management that contributes the professors' and learners' communication styles, learning patterns and thinking attitudes. However, adopting an innovation is not the same thing as implementing one. The pros and cons of this change process in higher education lies in applying strategies and principles that are largely educational and communicational to circumstances that is essentially critical. Besides, the presented frameworks in this study, is a cross table that guides the strategies and principles of BL for interactive classroom management. These strategies and principles concentrate on new models of BL implementation in higher education:

1. to plan, develop and implement interactive communication milieus with real-life experiences,

ideas, opinions and discussions on designing radical constructivist learning milieus,

2. to make more efficient inventions and decrease costs by building up natural resources to achieve scholarly challenges and concerns for divers learners through professor and learners partnerships,
3. to generate open and flexible knowledge societies by transforming critical thoughts, feelings and actions to solve complex educational problems with powerful and innovative solutions and perspectives via a critical curriculum design,
4. to include multiple and diverse areas of educational concerns, complex conceptions, practices, ideologies and epistemologies to investigate opposed definitions and visions for interactive classroom managements, and
5. to define into logical sets of types responsible to assessments, provide professors and learners with making sense out of fundamental characteristics of classroom formation and transformation under



a theory-based approach.

6. to share responsibility for BL that professors and learners can have sets of individual interests and needs of which they can be unenthusiastic and relinquish.

This framework investigates the challenges involved in effecting inclusive change in traditional classrooms. It delves into the dilemma of how a curriculum can be both learner-driven and globally supported. This can be able to provide diverse and critical insights. On the other hand, innovation in educational contexts requires not only stability but also change. As pointed out by Bonk, Kim and Zeng (2006), Mortera-Gutiérrez (2006), Kerres and De Witt (2003), and Singh (2003), the strategies and principles of BL should offer broad coverage of both democratic and traditional interventions. It must place these attempts in the RCT and MRT perspectives, concluding with implications for future works in building an interactive classroom management. This helps professor and learners to critically transmit culture from traditional learning environments to BL ones. The lucidity of this vision can be aided by a critical curriculum change in the innovative learning and communication milieus.

### **The Challenges of Blended Learning (BL) for Building an Interactive Classroom Management**

The values, ethics and biases as well as stereotypes from professors and learners can impede to transform a more powerful policy about change. In the lack of that clearly superior set of these issues, forced change might not be valid. Discussing the challenges of BL in higher education empowers an understanding about how professors and learners can communicate with each other. To cope with the various cultural and educational barriers, these people must combine the communication philosophy, concepts and resources for building an interactive communication management. Furthermore, it is relatively

easy to affect curriculum reform through either professor attitudes or learner needs. Therefore, the main key point of BL is to provide them with abundant opportunities to collaborate and support with each others to explore, exchange and share knowledge. This educational setting, also, can turn these challenges with cultural, educational, and legal changes in higher education. Professors and learners have different communicational needs, skills, and interests, and should achieve the goals and objectives of effective communication styles and abilities in BL settings. As stated by Choi (2004), Daniel, Matheos and McCalla (2004), Eveland (2003), Levy (2003), and Pease (2006), furthermore, building an interactive classroom management via BL must focus on describing a process of initiation, implementations, mutual adoption, continuation, facilitation and dissemination, which is analyzed with the real-life experiences of professors and learners. In this context, to deal with the challenges in a BL milieu it should emphasize the importance of diverse levels of needs which are felt essential for change. This thought takes place in two special types: First, the rational approach in which the force for curriculum change comes from diverse ambitions to transmit to a near future. Second, a decision making orientation in which disappointment with existing conditions motivates an ultimate solution.

On the other hand, building an interactive classroom encourages professors and learners to be adaptive. Therefore, they have to discuss their own design strategies and principles of BL. This development redefines their roles—that the educators can integrate BL-based activities in their traditional courses, and online communication workers can design, deliver, implement and evaluate BL environments. Moreover, these activities can provide useful assessment methods and techniques for processors and learners to improve their understandings about the

cutting-edge technologies in BL. They should plan and manage their communication activities so as to bring good impacts on their personal learning experiences and to share knowledge from the globe that they can focus on the need for personal assistive devices as well. Traditional communicational tools and methods (such as printed materials, TV, programs videos, software, images, photos, posters, etc.) can generate barriers for diverse learners. As mentioned by Moskal and Dziuban (2001), new communication technologies provide them with varied opportunities to design a BL setting for diverse individuals. Furthermore, professors and learners know about how to integrate flexibility in their classroom. They have to use a range of communication media powerfully, to select appropriate communication materials and methods efficiently, and to support diverse learners to reach their communicational goals effectively. In the complex times ahead, professors and learners can be able to share power and culture in various democratic ways. They have questions like what a BL milieu assumes their roles, what the pros and cons are effective a BL setting, and when they make policy choices what identities, values and critical thinking skills are reaffirmed or threatened to them.

As discussed by Johnson and Tang (2005), and Magjuka, Shi, and Bonk (2005), these technology-based collaborations allow them to interact with each other and with professionals around the world, and can gain global knowledge resources. While this is unquestionably not a new concept, it is one that needs to be refreshed and strengthened as higher education is developed for BL. The roles of professors and learners are considered as an integral part of the changing process. Besides, the design theories, models and strategies of BL, it must lead these people to redesign and revolutionize their new roles in these communication environment carefully. The standards and rubrics for interactive class managements

in higher education must direct their partnerships in these milieus as well. According to these concerns, there are four main issues about how to empower professors and learners:

1. building global knowledge networks to help professors and learners who are deeply engaged in BL-based activities in higher education by developing strong theoretical frameworks for their participations with each other in bringing about democratic changes in their classrooms,
2. supporting social, cultural and educational interactions and collaborations between professors and learners to build spaces for them to see possibilities, potentials and implications of moving beyond transmission model of communicating about educational and social justice issues,
3. emphasizing the attitudes, beliefs and expectations of them to address important cultural and social problems by exploring how to bring educational and social justice into real-life experiences in BL environments,
4. documenting effective learning practices for a democratic decision-making and dialogic leadership to promote interaction amongst practitioners.

### Results and Conclusions

This paper discusses a critical curriculum design for Blended Learning (BL) in higher education. The Radical Constructivist Theory (RCT) and Media Richness Theory (MRT) are the theoretical background of BL-based educational activities in classrooms. Furthermore, this paper developed a theoretical framework that discusses the strategies, principles and challenges of interactive classroom management. This is an open and flexible

framework to support powerful engagements among professors and learners. They can share responsibilities in this BL milieu. As noted by Harris and Stephen (2004), BL should explain the diverse needs and expectations of professors and learners in bringing about democratic decision-making as dialogic leaderships play an important role in affecting deep community change. These are crucial issues to investigate their complex responsibilities that they can become well-rounded knowledge-workers to shape a society-based on authentic and participatory decision making.

Engaging professor and learners in building interactive classroom management was a realistic, intriguing and real-life experience in higher education. This framework models how they translate theory into practice and state a pedagogical guideline for a critical curriculum development. Besides, they can become cognitive coaches together to build online knowledge societies from a pedagogical perspective. Professor and learners can try to investigate the explicit definitions for their roles, and to realize their changing responsibilities in learning environments. Interactive classroom management, therefore, is critical that they must restructure their collaboration styles to contribute high-quality communication skills and strategies.

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